**Title**: *Thin vs. Thick Description: A Critical Analysis of Representations of PWA in the CSD Literature*

**Proposal**:
Case studies documenting patterns of cognitive, linguistic, and physical disruptions experienced by individuals with brain damage have been a key basis of theory and research on the brain and communication disorders over the past 150 years. Narratives of discovery in neuropsychology are typically written around hallmark cases such as Broca's descriptions of "Tan" (e.g., Selnes & Hillis, 2000); the case of Phineas Gage (e.g., Damasio, 1994); or patient "H.M." in the literature on amnesia (e.g., Manns, 2004). In addition, the fit of individual cases with current understandings of diagnostic categories is used to evaluate theoretical frameworks (e.g., Duff, Wzsalek, & Cohen, 2008). Alexander Luria argued for the critical role of rich case studies in developing scientific accounts of brain-behavior relations, what he called a "romantic neurology" (e.g., Luria, 1968, 1972), a perspective echoed in Oliver Sacks' (1984) call for a "personal neurology." Luria and Sacks both offer rich, clinical narratives, thick descriptions of the impacts of brain injuries on individual lives. In contrast, our impression was that the research literature in CSD has increasingly relied on thin descriptions of research participants and clinical cases. To examine this issue, we have undertaken, and this poster will present, an extensive textual analysis of the representations of persons with aphasia (PWA) and other neurogenic communication disorders in the research literature of CSD between 1936 and 2013.

Thick vs Thin Descriptions: The widespread goal of thick description in qualitative research is grounded in Geertz's (1973) adaptation of Ryle's philosophical work to argue that study of cultures is fundamentally an interpretive process that requires *thick description* of social behaviors, structures, and practices. Thick description integrates details of social interaction with the broader cultural patterns that animate specific actions with meaning. As Geertz argued, thick description requires researchers not only to describe an action, such as briefly contracting one's right eyelid, but to interpret that action, as a blink, a twitch, or a wink, perhaps deployed conspiratorially, in parody, in rehearsal, or for deception. In contrast *thin description* attends to static isolated dimensions, such as basic observational protocols (e.g., contracting one's right eyelid), classification within given categories, or, as Marcus (1998) notes, accounts driven by theoretical frameworks unanchored from details of people's lives, which, he argues, reduces "the space of potential discovery and increased understandings of processes and relationships in the world (which require a bedrock of very thick description indeed)" (p. 18.). In our analysis, we have adapted these concepts to characterize the representation of people and their social worlds in the research literature of CSD. Thus, *thin representation* is characterized by decontextualized, reductionist representations, often oriented to demographic and disciplinary categories. In contrast, *thick representation* includes contextualizing, dynamic, interpretive accounts of people and their social worlds.

Characterizing the Research Literature: The research literature in CSD has often been driven by the goal of building population-based knowledge, leading clinicians and researchers to argue for specifying diagnostic categories and standardizing subject descriptions in research reports (e.g., McNeil & Pratt, 2001; Myers, 2001). Of course, as is typical of medical and allied health professions, clinical case reports are used to exemplify diagnostic and treatment practices (e.g., Lesser & Perkins, 1999; Tanner, 2006), particularly in training clinicians. Though often in

textbooks, such reports also appear as case exemplars in research reports. A key goal of our analysis then is to identify the central genres (e.g., research reports, clinical case reports, review articles) and research paradigms (e.g., experimental studies, discourse analysis, case studies) found in the CSD research literature and to detail how and where representations of PWA and other neurogenic disorders appear in our literature.

**Method**
The textual analysis presented here was conducted by a research team (two funded graduate research assistants, the first and second authors, eight undergraduate independent study students, and the PI, Hengst). We selected 14 CSD research journals for analysis: five flagship journals of ASHA (*JSHR, JSHD, JSLHR, AJSLP, LSHSS*), three of Speech Pathology Australia (*IJSLP, JCPSLP, ACQ*), two of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (*IJLCD, BJLCD*); and four specialty journals (*Aphasiology*, *JMSLP, JCD, AAC*). Each journal was assigned to a coding team (2-4 research assistants per team). All peer-reviewed articles are being categorized by: a) *genre type* (review, research or pedagogy); b) *research design* (clinical case study, interpretive case study, single subject design, survey, longitudinal, quasi experimental, descriptive or mixed); and c) *target population or disorder* (aphasia/cognitive communication disorders, school age language acquisition and social pragmatic disorder, stuttering and voice disorder, mixed). In addition, *evidence of thick representation* of the participants or clinical cases (e.g., inclusion of social validity, anecdotes about participants' lives, descriptions of home environment) is noted. Using a consensus coding process, decisions made by primary coders are reviewed by a second coder. Coding is discussed in weekly team meetings, coding protocols are updated, and previously coded articles are recoded as needed. Using descriptive statistical analysis, we will characterize the percentage of articles across decades for each journal focusing on adult neurogenic populations by type of article, type of research design, and inclusion of characteristics of thick descriptions.

Finally, detailed discourse analysis of the representations of PWA and other neurogenic communication disorders will be completed on a core set of articles from each decade for each journal. Core articles include all those that include elements of thick representation, as well as exemplars of each genre type and research paradigm for articles focusing on neurogenic communication disorders. Our discourse analysis identifies key discourse markers (e.g., in language, images, numbers and tropes) used in the representation of people and their social worlds.

**Results**
We are now approximately half way through the categorical analysis of articles and have begun identifying core articles for the discourse analysis. We anticipate all analyses will be completed by early May 2014. Preliminary results from the categorical analysis of six journals display a strong pattern of thin representations of people across genres, research designs, and target populations, with only approximately 15% of articles having elements of thick representation of people. At the low end, only 10% of articles in *AJSLP* (reviewed 1991 to 2012) display elements of thick representation (66 articles out of 659), and that percentage has declined (from 13% in 1990s to 6% since 2010). At the higher end, 24% of articles in *Aphasiology* (so far reviewed from 1987 to 2000) have elements of thick representation (209 articles out of 798), and that seems to be increasing (8% in the 1980s; 27% in the 1990s). Closer quantitative and qualitative analysis of the representations of people and their social worlds is in progress.

**Discussion**

This textual analysis presented here will undergird a broader ethnographic project examining how representations of people (research participants and clients/patients) in the research literature shapes clinical practice, specifically how it is taken up in educational materials and by practicing clinicians as they manage clinical work. The poster will note some possible implications and further research questions that follow from this analysis.